Zoroastrian Echoes in the Abrahamic Imagination: Dualism, Eschatology, and the Limits of Theological Certainty

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

www.youvan.ai

January 15, 2026

The theological architecture of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam shares certain motifs with Zoroastrianism that have provoked centuries of speculation about influence, borrowing, and convergence. This paper avoids both overreach and dismissal, focusing on three central motifs—cosmic moral struggle, the organization of angelic and demonic worlds, and a linear eschatological arc involving resurrection, final judgment, and world restoration. Rather than asserting direct lineage or dependency, the argument centers on how these shared structures reflect deeper human attempts to grapple with the presence of evil and the justice of God. Zoroastrian dualism poses a sharp contrast to Abrahamic monotheism, especially in its portrayal of evil as an active cosmological force, yet all four traditions converge on an ethical imperative to choose the good and await cosmic vindication. Through careful theological and comparative analysis, the paper examines what can be responsibly claimed about influence, what differences matter doctrinally, and what the entire exercise reveals about the epistemological limits of religious language. It concludes that comparative theology's highest contribution may not be explanatory mastery, but a cultivated posture of disciplined reverence, ethical clarity, and humility before mysteries that no model can fully contain.

Keywords: Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, dualism, monotheism, eschatology, resurrection, judgment, Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu, Satan, angels, demons, apocalyptic theology, comparative religion, evil, theodicy, Second Temple Judaism, metaphysics, epistemic humility.

A collaboration with GPT-5.2-Thinking. 45 pages. CC4.0.

Outline

1. Introduction: The Temptation and the Risk of Comparison
1.1 Why Zoroastrianism is repeatedly invoked in Abrahamic studies
1.2 Common motifs versus theological structure
1.3 What comparison reveals—and conceals

2. A Narrow Lens: Three Core Motifs Across Traditions
2.1 Cosmic moral struggle: good and evil as competing world-forces
2.2 Angelic and demonic hierarchies: moral mediation in unseen realms
2.3 Eschatology: resurrection, final judgment, and restored order

3. Modes of Influence: What It Means to "Echo"
3.1 Direct borrowing vs thematic convergence
3.2 The Persian context of Second Temple Judaism
3.3 Limits of textual and archaeological evidence

4. God and Evil in Zoroastrianism
4.1 Ahura Mazda and the principle of *Asha*
4.2 Angra Mainyu: active adversary or derivative shadow?
4.3 The cosmic structure of moral agency

5. God and Evil in the Abrahamic Traditions
5.1 The indivisible sovereignty of God
5.2 Satan as creature, not principle
5.3 Evil as rebellion rather than metaphysical dual

6. Angels and Demons: Mediators, Witnesses, and Adversaries
6.1 The growth of angelology and demonology
6.2 Purposes served: order, narrative, moral psychology
6.3 Dangers: cosmic inflation and spiritual distraction

7. Resurrection and Judgment: The Moral Grammar of End Times
7.1 Bodily resurrection across traditions
7.2 Judgment as justice: retribution, restoration, or both
7.3 The "end" as a revelation of divine character

8. Not the Parent, But Perhaps a Neighbor
8.1 Why Zoroastrianism is not the "parent religion"
8.2 Shared concerns without shared cosmology
8.3 The case for subtle influence on eschatological shape

9. Epistemological Caution: Knowing God and Naming Evil
9.1 The theological cost of overdefinition
9.2 Why mystery is not failure
9.3 The fruit criterion: truthfulness, repentance, courage

10. Conclusion: Similar Motifs, Distinct Theologies, Shared Questions
10.1 What remains shared after all distinctions are made
10.2 When similarity is a tool—and when it is a trap
10.3 The final wisdom: clarity in what we say, humility in what we cannot

11. References
11.1 Primary sacred texts across traditions
11.2 Historical-critical scholarship on Persian-Judaic interaction
11.3 Comparative theology, angelology, apocalyptic studies, and theodicy

Art

1. Introduction: Why This Comparison Won't Die

The comparison between Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic religions returns like a tide because it satisfies several human hungers at once. First, it offers a clean explanation for complex religious development: if later Judaism, Christianity, and Islam contain robust accounts of evil, angels, demons, resurrection, and final judgment, then perhaps these were "imported" from a neighboring tradition that already possessed a dramatic cosmic template. Second, it offers a satisfying narrative economy. One can tell a single story—Persian empire, Jewish exile and return, cultural contact, theological borrowing—and let that story do far more work than the evidence can sustain. Third, the comparison presses on a deep moral intuition that refuses to go away: evil feels larger than private psychology. It feels systemic, intelligent, and "world-shaped." Traditions that articulate a cosmic struggle, populate the unseen realm with moral agents, and promise a final settling of accounts speak to that intuition with unique force.

But the same factors that make this comparison attractive also make it dangerous. It can become a shortcut that replaces close reading with a genealogy slogan; it can flatten real doctrinal differences into a vague "they all say the same thing"; or it can tempt the writer to speak with a confidence that the sources and the limits of human knowing do not justify. The goal of this paper is to hold the comparison in a steady hand: to acknowledge why the parallels are compelling, to separate the plausible from the sensational, and to use the exercise for what it can genuinely deliver—clarity about motifs, boundaries, and the disciplined humility required when speaking about God, evil, and the end of history.

1.1 The "parent religion" claim and why it misleads

Calling Zoroastrianism the "parent" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam misleads in three distinct ways: historically, structurally, and theologically.

Historically, "parent" implies a genealogical descent. Yet the Abrahamic line has its own clear internal continuity: Israel's covenantal narrative; prophetic critique; law, worship, and communal identity; and later developments within Second Temple Judaism that shape both Christianity and Islam's inherited vocabulary. Even if contact with Persian religion influenced certain Jewish ideas, influence is not the same thing as origin. Parents generate children; neighbors shape one another. Religious history—especially in imperial crossroads—often looks less like a family tree and more like overlapping ecosystems.

Structurally, the "parent" claim treats a few shared motifs as if they define the whole. It quietly assumes that if two traditions share a cosmic conflict, a developed angelic world, and an eschatological horizon, then the deeper framework must be the same. But motifs are not frameworks. Two architects can both use arches and domes while building utterly different structures. Likewise, two theologies can both speak of judgment and restoration while

grounding those claims in radically different accounts of God, covenant, prophecy, and the nature of evil. The Abrahamic traditions, in their classic forms, insist that God is the single sovereign Creator; even Satan is not a rival principle but a creaturely adversary. Zoroastrian dualistic language can feel closer to "two opposed forces" at the cosmic level, even where it moves toward an ultimate resolution that denies evil final parity. Collapsing these differences into "parenthood" turns precision into propaganda.

Theologically, the "parent" claim can be an attempt to demote revelation into cultural diffusion. Sometimes that move is motivated by a modern suspicion of the sacred: if a later tradition's eschatology resembles an earlier one, then the later tradition must be derivative, and therefore less true or less serious. But even if one grants influence, that conclusion still doesn't follow. Religious traditions do not function like patents. Borrowing a motif does not settle the question of truth; it merely clarifies the historical pathways through which communities learn to speak. In fact, one could argue the opposite: recurring motifs across cultures may testify not to theft, but to the persistence of certain human questions that repeatedly force symbolic articulation.

So the "parent religion" claim fails as a history claim (it overstates descent), fails as a method claim (it confuses motifs with frameworks), and fails as a theology claim (it smuggles in a verdict about truth under the cover of genealogy).

1.2 A disciplined alternative: influence, convergence, and shared human questions

A better approach is modest but more powerful: treat the similarities as a problem to be described accurately, not a verdict to be announced quickly. That means distinguishing three possibilities that often blur together in popular discussion.

Influence means something like transmission: contact, translation, debate, adaptation, and eventual integration. Here the relevant questions are concrete. Where did communities interact? What ideas were already present in each tradition before contact? What changes can be observed, and can they plausibly be explained by that contact rather than by internal development? Influence can be real, partial, and asymmetrical without implying that one religion "generated" the other.

Convergence means independent development toward similar solutions. Human beings across cultures face similar pressures: the reality of suffering, the experience of moral violation, the longing for justice that history does not deliver, the sense that evil is not merely error but antagonism. When communities attempt to honor these pressures while preserving hope, they often generate similar symbolic architectures: unseen moral agents, a final judgment, a restored world. Convergence is not a weak explanation; it is often the right one when evidence for direct dependence is thin or when the motif appears in multiple places without a clear transmission chain.

Shared human questions are the deepest layer. The reason the comparison persists is that it is not merely about texts; it is about the moral shape of reality. Does evil have intelligence? Is it merely the sum of bad choices, or is it a power that recruits systems, ideologies, and institutions? Is there a final justice, or does history end in ambiguity? If God is good, why does evil remain so effective? These questions push religious language toward cosmic frames because cosmic frames can name the magnitude of the experience. The comparison between Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic traditions is therefore partly a historical inquiry and partly a diagnostic of what humans must say when they refuse to trivialize evil and refuse to surrender hope.

A disciplined alternative, then, is not timid. It can be bracingly honest. It admits what the evidence can and cannot establish, while also taking seriously the possibility that recurring motifs indicate something profound about moral reality as experienced by human beings. The aim is neither debunking nor mythmaking. It is disciplined speech.

1.3 Method: comparing motifs without collapsing doctrines

The method of this paper is deliberately narrow and careful: compare specific motifs while preserving the doctrinal ecosystems in which those motifs live. That requires several guardrails.

First, isolate motifs before you explain them. We begin with three motifs that repeatedly anchor the comparison: cosmic moral struggle, developed angel/demon worlds, and resurrection with judgment and restoration. We describe how each motif functions within each tradition, not merely that it exists. A motif's role matters as much as its presence.

Second, keep levels distinct. There is a difference between moral dualism (good and evil are in conflict), metaphysical dualism (reality is grounded in two opposed ultimate principles), and rhetorical dualism (language that intensifies moral urgency by polarizing symbols). Traditions can share one level while rejecting another. Much confusion comes from treating these levels as identical.

Third, treat "influence" as a hypothesis, not a slogan. Influence must be argued from plausible pathways and recognizable transformations, not merely asserted because similarities are convenient. Where the evidence is ambiguous, the paper will say so. Ambiguity is not failure; it is intellectual honesty.

Fourth, refuse the "all religions are the same" temptation. Similar motifs do not erase decisive differences—about the identity of God, the status of evil, the role of covenant and prophecy, the meaning of revelation, and the nature of salvation. Comparative work becomes valuable precisely when it can hold similarity and difference at once, without using either as a weapon.

Fifth, let the comparison do moral and epistemic work. The point is not only to classify ideas, but to learn the cost of our words. When we speak of God and evil, we are always at risk of over-definition: turning mystery into mechanics, and reverence into metaphysical bravado. The phrase "These are subtle points for men who can't really know" names a permanent truth: our models can be helpful without being final. This paper takes that limitation seriously, not as a reason to stop thinking, but as a reason to think with a chastened confidence—enough clarity to avoid confusion, enough humility to avoid idolatry of explanation.

With these guardrails in place, the comparison can finally be what it should be: not a parentage myth, not a debunking gesture, but a disciplined inquiry into how different traditions organize the moral universe—and how our language about God must remain both truthful and restrained.

2. The Three Shared Motifs: A Minimal Common Ground

If the comparison between Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic traditions is to be handled honestly, it must begin with a small, defensible platform—shared motifs described in a way that does not prejudge the larger doctrinal architectures. The point here is not to argue that the religions "say the same thing," nor to claim that similarity proves dependence. The point is simply to name a minimal common ground: three motifs that repeatedly appear in the scholarly and popular comparisons and that, at a high enough altitude, can be stated without distortion.

Yet even at this minimal level, a warning is required. Motifs are not doctrines. Motifs are recurring shapes of imagination, ways of speaking that help communities hold together moral meaning, divine justice, and the felt weight of evil. Doctrines are disciplined commitments about what is ultimately real: who God is, what evil is, what salvation means, what history is for. Two traditions can share a motif and still disagree about almost everything that matters. So we name the motifs in a controlled way: clear enough to be recognizable, spare enough to avoid collapsing differences, and careful enough to preserve the possibility that similarity can arise through influence, convergence, or the pressure of shared human questions.

2.1 Cosmic moral struggle: good versus evil as a universe-scale drama

The first shared motif is the sense that moral reality is not confined to private choice or local social order. Good and evil are not merely adjectives for behavior; they are powers that shape worlds. This "cosmic moral struggle" can be expressed with different metaphysical commitments, but the experiential claim behind it is consistent: evil feels larger than a mistake. It feels like an adversary. It recruits. It organizes. It propagates. And goodness, likewise, is not merely niceness. It is alignment with a deeper order—truth, justice, rightness—that holds the world together.

In Zoroastrianism, the moral universe is famously dramatized. The world is a field of contest between truth and the lie, order and chaos, constructive and destructive forces. The vocabulary differs across periods and schools, and the details are not uniform, but the central moral intuition is robust: reality is ethically structured, and the human being is not a spectator. The human is a participant whose choices matter not only socially but cosmically. Moral action contributes to the triumph of truth; moral compromise collaborates with the destructive principle. Even when later interpretation complicates how "dualistic" the metaphysics should be considered, the existential posture remains: the universe is morally serious, and the conflict is real.

In the Abrahamic traditions, the cosmic struggle is framed differently—less as two opposed ultimate principles and more as God's good creation contested by rebellion, corruption, and accusing forces. But the motif is still present: there is a drama that transcends human institutions and psychological explanations. In Jewish, Christian, and Islamic imagination, evil can appear as a personal adversary (Satan or analogous figures), as a host of rebellious beings, or as a systemic spiritual pressure that bends societies toward injustice and idolatry. This is not metaphysical symmetry; the Creator remains sovereign. Yet it is still cosmic: the struggle involves heaven and earth, seen and unseen, history and judgment.

What matters for comparison is not the metaphysical model but the moral consequence. The motif gives ethical life a gravity that mere moralism cannot sustain. If evil is only error, then repentance becomes self-improvement. If evil is also adversarial—intelligent and recruiting—then repentance becomes resistance, vigilance, and fidelity. The cosmic struggle motif is, in this sense, a moral amplifier. It says: your choices are not small; truth is not a preference; evil is not a private hobby. It is a universe-scale drama in which human agency is meaningful.

But the motif carries risks. When cosmic struggle becomes a total explanation, it can externalize responsibility ("the devil made me do it"), inflate paranoia ("everything is spiritual warfare"), or justify cruelty ("we must destroy the enemy"). A disciplined comparison therefore notes both the power and the danger. The shared motif is not a license for simplistic dualisms of tribe and enemy. It is an attempt to honor the reality that evil is often bigger than individual intention, without surrendering the individual's responsibility to choose the good.

2.2 Developed angel and demon worlds: spiritual ecology and moral agency

The second shared motif is the "population" of the unseen realm. As traditions mature, the spiritual universe often becomes more articulated: not only God and humans, but ranks, functions, agents, adversaries, messengers, accusers, and guardians. This can be called a "spiritual ecology"—a complex environment of intelligences with moral directionality and roles within a larger order.

In Zoroastrian contexts, this ecology can appear as a structured moral cosmos with beneficent beings aligned with truth and destructive beings aligned with the lie. The point is not simply supernatural ornamentation. It is the mapping of moral reality into a world with structure: good is not abstract; it has agents and supports; evil is not vague; it has tactics and allies. The invisible world mirrors the visible: order is defended, chaos attacks, and the human being stands at the crossroads, aided and tempted, strengthened and tested.

In the Abrahamic traditions, angelology and demonology become more elaborated especially in later Jewish literature and then in Christian and Islamic developments. Angels function as messengers, worshipers, guardians, executors of judgment, and symbols of divine order. Demons and rebellious spirits function as tempters, deceivers, oppressors, and accusers. Again, the metaphysical status is different than strong dualism: these beings are not rival deities. Yet they serve a similar narrative and moral function: they provide a grammar for describing moral pressure that exceeds the individual.

Why do traditions develop these spiritual ecologies? Several reasons converge.

First, the ecology protects transcendence. If God is not a local deity who directly does everything in a crude mechanistic way, then mediation becomes a way of speaking: messages, missions, powers, and agencies that preserve both divine sovereignty and the complexity of the world.

Second, the ecology explains moral texture. People experience temptation, accusation, and deception as forces. They experience sudden courage and unexpected help as gifts. Whether one reads these as metaphors, realities, or both, the language of spiritual agents gives a handle for describing the felt phenomenology of moral life.

Third, the ecology intensifies accountability. If the unseen realm witnesses, records, and participates, then life is lived before a larger court than human opinion. This strengthens the idea that justice is not exhausted by history.

But the ecology also produces its own dangers. It can become mythologized—an invisible bureaucracy that distracts from obedience, love, and truth. It can encourage scapegoating, obsession, and the replacement of ethical work with spiritual speculation. Comparative clarity requires stating both sides: the motif offers a serious moral cosmology, but it can also become a substitute for seriousness if it turns into a fascination with the unseen rather than a training in truthfulness.

In a disciplined reading, “angel and demon worlds” are not primarily about paranormal curiosity. They are about moral agency in a universe that is not morally neutral. The shared motif is a way of saying: the moral life is not only horizontal (human to human); it is also vertical (human in relation to God, truth, and ultimate judgment).

2.3 Resurrection, final judgment, and restoration: history with an end

The third shared motif is eschatological: history is not a circle without meaning and not merely an open-ended drift. It has an end that is also a revelation. Evil does not get the last word. Justice is not merely a human project. There is a final accounting, and the world is restored to a right order.

In Zoroastrian tradition, the broad arc is often described as a movement toward the defeat of evil and the renewal of the world. The details vary across texts and interpretations, but the moral structure is clear: history tends toward a culminating resolution in which truth is vindicated, the destructive principle is overcome, and a restored order emerges. The eschatological motif thus anchors ethics: what you do now participates in what the world is for. The future is not merely what happens; it is what reality is moving toward.

In the Abrahamic traditions, resurrection and judgment likewise function as the moral horizon. In Jewish thought, especially as it develops in later periods, resurrection and judgment are ways of affirming that God's justice cannot be defeated by death or by the apparent triumph of the wicked. In Christianity, resurrection is not only end-times doctrine but also a central claim about God's action in history, grounding hope in a decisive divine victory over death. In Islam, the Day of Judgment is a dominant organizing reality: the world is a test, actions matter, and God's final judgment restores moral truth against all the distortions of time.

Across these traditions, the motif does several kinds of work at once.

First, it affirms embodied justice. If people suffer in their bodies, are killed, starved, tortured, or erased, a purely spiritual consolation can feel like moral evasion. Resurrection answers that pressure by insisting that justice is not an abstraction. It reaches the whole human person.

Second, it affirms moral meaning against historical cynicism. Empires fall and rise; victims remain unavenged; truth is buried; liars prosper. Final judgment says: history's scoreboard is not final. This is not naive optimism; it is a refusal to let injustice become metaphysically normal.

Third, it frames restoration as telos. The end is not merely punishment. It is right order—repair, purification, vindication, and a world set straight. The idea of restoration is the point at which eschatology becomes theology of God's character: God is not only powerful enough to judge, but good enough to restore.

The danger, again, is misapplication. Eschatology can be weaponized into date-setting hysteria, used to escape ethical responsibility ("it's all going to burn anyway"), or turned into a self-justifying narrative ("we are the righteous remnant; everyone else is doomed"). The disciplined approach treats eschatology as moral architecture, not as a speculation hobby. The motif is meant to make present action more serious, not less.

Taken together, these three motifs form a minimal common ground. They do not prove dependence, but they explain why the comparison continues: both Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic traditions provide a moral cosmology in which evil is real and consequential, unseen realities participate in moral life, and history moves toward judgment and restoration. The next task is to show how this common ground can coexist with decisive differences about God, evil, and sovereignty—and how any claims about influence must respect both the similarities and the boundaries.

3. What "Influence" Can Mean: A Toolbox for Responsible Claims

"Influence" is one of those words that sounds like a conclusion while still being only a hypothesis. In comparative religion, it can mean anything from a clear case of borrowing to a vague sense of shared atmosphere. If we do not discipline the term, we end up with a lazy argument: "These motifs look similar, therefore one must come from the other." The goal of this section is to replace that shortcut with a toolbox: several distinct models of influence (and non-influence), plus criteria for when each model is more responsible than the others. The payoff is not just better history. It is better theology, because overconfident genealogies tend to flatten difference and inflate certainty. A careful vocabulary lets us say "possibly," "plausibly," "unlikely," and "unknown" without losing intellectual seriousness.

3.1 Direct borrowing, mediated borrowing, and parallel development

Direct borrowing is the strongest and least common claim. It means identifiable transmission from a source tradition into a target tradition in a way that is difficult to explain otherwise. In its ideal form, direct borrowing has several marks: a known contact zone, a plausible community of translators or intermediaries, a clear before-and-after shift in the target tradition, and some recognizable imprint of the source (terminology, narrative structures, or distinctive conceptual pairings that travel together). Direct borrowing is not impossible. It is just harder to demonstrate than people assume.

Mediated borrowing is usually the more realistic option. Ideas rarely travel as pristine packages. They move through many hands: merchants, soldiers, scribes, court administrators, intermarried families, diaspora communities, and schools of interpretation. In mediated borrowing, a motif may enter not as "Zoroastrian doctrine" but as a story-shape, a moral drama, a set of images, or a conceptual pressure that gets reinterpreted inside the receiving tradition's own commitments. The receiving tradition does not "copy." It metabolizes. It translates the motif into its own grammar. This is crucial: when people say "influence," what they often imagine is a simple import, when the real process is typically re-creation under constraint. A

tradition can adopt a motif while subverting its original metaphysics. It can keep the dramatic shape while reversing the ontology.

Parallel development is the most common and the most emotionally unsatisfying explanation, because it refuses a neat genealogy. But it is often the best explanation when similarities are broad and the evidence for transmission is thin. Parallel development means different traditions, facing similar human pressures, generate similar symbolic solutions. Consider what pressures repeatedly show up across cultures: the felt intelligence of evil, the desire for moral accounting beyond death, the need to reconcile divine goodness with historical injustice, and the sense that humans are caught in forces larger than themselves. Under those pressures, it is unsurprising that traditions independently produce (a) a cosmic moral struggle, (b) a populated unseen realm, and (c) an eschatological horizon of judgment and restoration. These motifs are not exotic; they are stable solutions to stable problems.

A responsible claim about "influence" usually sounds like this: the motifs could be explained by parallel development alone, but certain features suggest possible mediated borrowing in specific contexts. That is a cautious claim, but it is not weak. It is the proper strength when the historical record is partial and the phenomena are psychologically and morally universal.

3.2 The problem of dating, redaction, and later systematization

Even when a contact zone is clear, the comparison becomes treacherous because texts do not arrive to us as simple snapshots. They arrive as layered documents. "Dating" is not merely the date a story first arose; it includes the date of redaction, the date of compilation, the date of standardization, and the date of interpretive crystallization. This creates a recurring illusion: we compare a late, systematized form of one tradition to an earlier, less systematized form of another, and then mistake the difference in textual maturity for a difference in theological originality.

Redaction complicates the notion of "before and after." A tradition may preserve older layers while reframing them with later emphases. When you read a canon, you may be reading a long conversation, not a single moment. So it is dangerous to say "Judaism didn't have X until period Y" unless you specify what "have" means. Do you mean explicit formulation? Do you mean widespread acceptance? Do you mean presence in canonical texts rather than in interpretive traditions? Or do you mean the emergence of a motif as a dominant organizing theme? The answer changes the argument.

Later systematization is perhaps the most important caution. Many religious traditions develop clearer doctrines over time. That does not necessarily mean the doctrine was invented late; it may mean it was clarified late. Conversely, it may also mean a later community emphasized one strand among several, turning a complex field of voices into a cleaner system. The comparative

trap here is obvious: if one tradition's late system is very clear and another tradition's early material is more implicit or scattered, it becomes tempting to claim the clear system is the source of the scattered hints. But clarity can be an artifact of later theological labor, not a proof of originality.

A disciplined comparison therefore asks: are we comparing like with like? Are we comparing early layers to early layers, developed layers to developed layers, and interpretive traditions to interpretive traditions? Or are we accidentally comparing a mature theological map to a seed-stage set of images and concluding that the map caused the seed?

This is why the language of "influence" must remain provisional unless supported by more than surface resemblance. Historical contact is not the same as conceptual dependence. And conceptual resemblance is not the same as conceptual origin.

3.3 Similarity is not identity: avoiding the "same idea" fallacy

The most common error in these comparisons is the "same idea" fallacy: two traditions use similar language, therefore they mean the same thing; therefore one borrowed from the other. This is an error because ideas are defined not only by their surface shape, but by their internal logic and doctrinal ecology.

Take "good versus evil." On the surface, it sounds identical everywhere. But the controlling question is: what is evil, ontologically? Is it an independent principle? A rival cosmic power? A creature's rebellion? A privation or corruption of the good? A testing condition within a created order? Different answers generate different theologies even if the rhetoric overlaps. Two traditions can both speak of "war" between good and evil while disagreeing radically about whether evil is metaphysically ultimate or metaphysically derivative.

Take "angels and demons." Similarity of vocabulary can hide major differences in function. In one tradition, spiritual beings might function primarily as cosmic allies and adversaries in a dualistic struggle; in another, they function as servants and rebels within a single Creator's sovereignty. Both can look like "a populated unseen realm," but the meaning of the population differs. One is a metaphysical symmetry; the other is an administrative and moral hierarchy under one God. The surface looks similar; the architecture is not.

Take "resurrection and final judgment." Again, the shared motif can conceal distinct purposes. Is judgment primarily retributive, restorative, or both? Is resurrection the vindication of the righteous, the repair of creation, the defeat of death, the public unveiling of truth, or a legal acquittal? Traditions can overlap in the claim "there is judgment and restoration" while diverging about what justice is, what mercy means, and what the end of history reveals about God's character.

Avoiding the “same idea” fallacy requires three practical habits.

First, define the motif functionally. Ask not only “Is it there?” but “What does it do?” What moral work does it perform? What problem does it solve?

Second, trace the motif’s constraints. What other commitments does the tradition hold that shape the motif’s meaning? Monotheism, covenant, prophecy, incarnation, final prophethood, divine simplicity, the status of creation—these are not decorative doctrines; they constrain how motifs can be interpreted.

Third, watch for false equivalence created by translation. When we use a single English word (evil, devil, angel, judgment), we can unknowingly impose identity where there is only analogy. Responsible comparison keeps the analogy visible and refuses to turn it into sameness.

In short, “influence” is not a single claim but a spectrum of hypotheses, each with its own evidentiary burden. The disciplined approach does not forbid influence. It simply refuses to let resemblance do the work of proof. It allows us to say, with integrity, that motifs can echo across traditions while still being transformed by different conceptions of God, evil, and history—and that the most honest comparative work often ends not with triumphal explanations, but with clearer boundaries and cleaner speech.

4. Zoroastrian Theology in Brief: What Must Be Understood First

If we try to compare Zoroastrianism to the Abrahamic traditions without first letting Zoroastrian theology speak in its own terms, we will inevitably turn it into a caricature—either the simple “dualism religion” that supposedly bequeathed demons and end-times to everyone else, or the romanticized “pure ethical monotheism” that conveniently resembles whatever the writer already prefers. A disciplined comparison needs a middle posture: brief, careful, and alert to complexity. Zoroastrianism is not a single frozen system. It has historical depth, internal diversity, and layers of interpretation. Yet it also has a recognizable moral and theological center of gravity. For the purposes of this paper, three elements must be understood first: the primacy of truth and order, the nature of opposition and evil, and the ethical realism that makes moral choice metaphysically significant.

4.1 Ahura Mazda and the primacy of truth and order

At the heart of Zoroastrian theology stands Ahura Mazda, whose name is commonly rendered “Lord Wisdom.” This is not merely a title; it signals the tradition’s characteristic emphasis. The divine is not primarily portrayed as arbitrary power, capricious force, or local tribal patronage. The divine is wisdom, truth, and right order—an intelligible moral structure at the foundation of

reality. If you want a single word that captures the moral flavor, it is not “might” but “truth.” If you want a single contrast, it is not “Israel versus the nations” but “truth versus the lie.”

This primacy shows up in the conceptual role of truth and order, often expressed in the tradition by the idea of a right pattern or lawful structure of being. In Zoroastrian imagination, reality has a grain. It has a proper alignment. When beings and actions align with that grain, the world becomes more coherent, more life-giving, more truthful. When beings and actions oppose it, the world becomes disordered, deceptive, and destructive. God is not simply the biggest actor in the cosmos; God is the source and guarantor of the cosmos’s moral intelligibility.

This matters for comparison because it makes Zoroastrian religion unusually ethical in its cosmic imagination. The moral life is not an add-on to ritual correctness. It is central. The universe is not morally indifferent matter to be manipulated. It is a morally structured order in which truthfulness, right intention, and beneficent action are aligned with the deepest reality. That is why Zoroastrianism so easily produces a “cosmic moral struggle” motif: if truth is foundational, then deception is not merely a mistake; it is a counter-force that attacks the structure of being itself.

To put it simply: Ahura Mazda is not only worshiped; Ahura Mazda is the name of what is most real—wisdom and truth as ultimate. This creates a theology in which moral truth is not negotiable and in which religious life is, at its best, a form of alignment with the world’s deep order.

4.2 Angra Mainyu and the structure of opposition

If Ahura Mazda embodies wisdom and truth, then Angra Mainyu (often associated in later forms with Ahriman) names the principle or force of opposition: the destructive, deceitful, disordering impulse. Here we must be careful. Popular summaries love to say: “Zoroastrianism has two gods.” That formulation is sloppy. It captures a surface impression—two opposed cosmic poles—but it fails to distinguish between different kinds of dualism and different periods of doctrinal articulation.

What can responsibly be said is this: Zoroastrianism tends to portray evil not merely as human failure but as an active, organized opposition to truth. Evil is not only the absence of good; it is hostile to it. It attacks reality by attacking truthfulness—by twisting, lying, corrupting, and destroying. This is why Zoroastrianism often feels more “cosmically dualistic” than the Abrahamic traditions. The opposition is not merely interpersonal; it is structural. It is embedded in the story the universe is living through.

But “opposition” need not mean “equal.” One can speak of a real adversarial structure without implying metaphysical parity. Different Zoroastrian interpretations have handled this differently, and later systematizations can sharpen or soften the dualistic edge. What matters for our

comparison is the functional role: the tradition gives evil a cosmic intelligibility. Evil is not chaos by accident; it is chaos by intent. It is not merely the world's roughness; it is antagonism aimed at truth and life.

This "structure of opposition" has consequences.

First, it turns theology into moral realism. If evil is opposition to truth, then moral compromise is not merely weakness; it is collaboration with deception. This raises the stakes of ordinary life.

Second, it intensifies the idea of history as conflict. The world is a theater in which truth and the lie contend. That drama is not reducible to politics or psychology, even if it manifests through them.

Third, it produces a distinctive moral psychology. The human being is not only tempted by appetite; the human being is solicited by lies—false interpretations of reality that promise advantage while undermining the order of being. Evil becomes primarily a matter of deception and disorder, not merely of desire.

In comparative terms, this is where people often make their boldest claims: "Angra Mainyu is the template for Satan." But that is exactly the kind of claim that must be earned rather than assumed. Even if there is influence, the Abrahamic traditions typically insist that Satan is a creature under God's sovereignty, not a rival metaphysical principle. So the relationship, if any, is not identity. It is analogy under different constraints. Zoroastrian opposition is more structurally dualistic; Abrahamic opposition is more creaturely and juridical. The surface resemblance is real; the metaphysical scaffolding differs.

4.3 Ethical realism: why moral choice is metaphysically loaded

If you want the pulse of Zoroastrian spirituality, it is here: moral choice is not merely pragmatic, and it is not merely social. Moral choice participates in reality's structure. Zoroastrianism is often described as ethically intense because it treats human actions as contributions to the world's direction. The moral agent helps reality become truer or more deceptive, more ordered or more disordered, more life-giving or more destructive.

This can sound abstract until you see what it implies. In a spiritually thin worldview, moral rules are external constraints: do this, don't do that. In a morally realist worldview, moral truth is part of what the world is. The moral law is not arbitrary; it is descriptive of alignment with reality's grain. To choose truth is to choose the real. To choose the lie is to choose disintegration. Ethical action is not merely obedience; it is a metaphysical act—an act that resonates with the world's deep structure.

This is why Zoroastrianism so naturally joins ethics to cosmic history. If the universe is a moral drama, then human beings are not extras. They are participants. Their choices are meaningful

contributions. The tradition therefore tends to treat moral life as active resistance against the lie and active cooperation with truth. This gives daily decisions a cosmic dignity. It also provides a framework for why the end of history matters: if moral choices are metaphysically real, then reality's final resolution must vindicate truth, not merely tolerate it.

Here the comparison with the Abrahamic traditions becomes especially interesting. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, moral choice is also weighty, but it is often framed through covenantal obedience, divine command, and accountability before God's judgment. The metaphysical loading is present—choices matter eternally—but the grounding differs: it is less "alignment with a cosmic truth-order" as an abstract principle, and more "faithfulness to the living God" who commands, judges, and restores. Both can lead to intense moral seriousness. But the rationale differs, and that difference shapes how motifs are interpreted.

A final caution belongs here. Ethical realism can be misused. If one treats moral struggle as metaphysically loaded in a simplistic way, one can become harsh, paranoid, or self-righteous. The tradition's best form does not demand that believers see enemies everywhere; it demands truthfulness, integrity, and beneficence. The cosmic frame is meant to deepen responsibility, not inflate ego. It says the world is morally serious; it does not say you are morally superior.

So, in brief: Zoroastrian theology, at its center, is a moral metaphysics. Ahura Mazda names truth and wise order as ultimate. Angra Mainyu names opposition to that truth as an active, deceptive, destructive force. And the human being is placed inside this drama with genuine agency—where moral choice is not merely social etiquette but participation in the world's deepest conflict. Without understanding these three elements, any comparison to the Abrahamic religions will either overstate dependence or understate difference. With them in view, we can proceed to the next step: how the Abrahamic traditions frame God and evil under the constraints of sovereign monotheism—and why the similarities that remain are real but never identical.

5. The Abrahamic Backbone: Where the Lineage Actually Runs

If Zoroastrianism provides a striking moral cosmology, the Abrahamic religions provide something different: a lineage shaped not primarily by cosmic metaphysics but by covenantal history. This is the most important corrective to "parent religion" narratives. The Abrahamic backbone does not run from an abstract dualism into later monotheisms. It runs through a particular people's story—through promises, deliverance, law, worship, failure, exile, return, and an evolving interpretive tradition that holds together divine transcendence and moral demand. Whatever influences may have touched the edges, the spine is internal: Israel's God known

through covenant and history, and then the branching developments of Christianity and Islam as new claims about how that God's purposes are fulfilled and communicated.

The three motifs we identified earlier—cosmic struggle, spiritual ecology, and eschatology—can and do appear within the Abrahamic world. But they are not the skeleton. They are, at most, organs and muscles that develop within the body's existing anatomy. To see why, we need to name the backbone: covenant and history, prophecy/law/worship, and the specific patterns of continuity and discontinuity from Judaism to Christianity and Islam.

5.1 Covenant and history: God revealed in a people's story

The Abrahamic religions begin, not as a philosophical theorem about the One, and not as a cosmic drama abstracted from time, but as a claim about divine initiative in history. God is not known first as "the principle of truth-order" but as the living Lord who calls, promises, judges, delivers, and binds a people to Himself. The key word here is covenant: a structured relationship with moral terms, historical memory, and communal identity.

In the Jewish narrative core, God's revelation is not primarily an unveiling of metaphysical architecture. It is the formation of a people through events that become normative: call, exodus, covenant, land, temple, exile, return. The identity of God is bound to acts—deliverance, provision, judgment, mercy—and to a name that resists capture by human systems. God is the one who acts and speaks, who liberates and commands, who calls a community into holiness and justice, and who holds that community accountable. Even when later Jewish philosophy explores divine attributes, it does so within this inherited story-world. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God who makes promises and then forces history to answer for them.

This matters for our comparison because it shows why the Abrahamic traditions are not well-explained by "borrowing motifs." You can borrow a motif like "final judgment" or "cosmic struggle," but you do not borrow a covenantal identity without rewriting the entire tradition. The Abrahamic God is not merely the highest being in the cosmos; God is the covenant Lord whose relationship with a particular people becomes the lens through which the entire moral universe is interpreted. Evil is not only chaos; it is covenant unfaithfulness, injustice, idolatry, oppression, and the betrayal of the poor. Justice is not only cosmic order; it is concrete: widows, orphans, strangers, honest weights, truthful speech, faithful worship, repaired relationships, and communal righteousness.

The covenantal shape also creates a distinctive moral imagination: sin is not merely error; it is rupture of relationship. Repentance is not merely self-improvement; it is return—turning back to God. Judgment is not merely cosmic balance; it is covenant accountability. And restoration is not merely a repaired cosmos; it is a renewed people and, ultimately, a renewed creation under

God's kingship. Even where cosmic motifs appear, they are typically subordinated to this relational-historical frame. The universe is morally serious because God is morally serious—and because God has bound Himself, by promise, to a history that refuses to let injustice be the final meaning.

5.2 Prophecy, law, and worship: the shaping of monotheistic imagination

If covenant and history form the backbone, then prophecy, law, and worship are the disciplined practices that shape the Abrahamic imagination over centuries. These three elements do not merely add content; they constrain what can and cannot be said about God, evil, and the moral life.

Prophecy functions as a moral engine. The prophets do not mainly deliver metaphysical treatises; they deliver divine accusations and divine hopes. They name idolatry as spiritual adultery, injustice as covenant betrayal, and empty worship as offense. They also insist that God's purposes exceed any political regime: empires are judged, kings are measured, and the poor are seen. Prophetic speech therefore deepens moral realism without requiring metaphysical dualism. Evil can be systemic, institutional, and spiritually charged, yet the prophet still refuses to grant it ultimate status. God's sovereignty remains, and the prophet's primary task is to call the people back to truth in the presence of power.

Law shapes monotheism into a lived form. In the Abrahamic world, monotheism is not merely a statement about the number of gods. It is a total claim on life: a way of ordering time (Sabbath, feasts), body (purity and practice), economy (debt, gleaning, justice), and speech (truthfulness, vows). The law trains a people to live as if God is real, holy, and near. This training is one of the deepest reasons Abrahamic religion cannot be reduced to imported motifs. The content of the law is not a cosmetic layer. It is an entire moral civilization built around the confession that there is one God who commands justice and fidelity.

Worship then binds the entire system together. It protects transcendence and forms desire. The Abrahamic traditions insist that God is not an object inside the cosmos. God is worshiped, not used. Worship is therefore an epistemic discipline as much as a spiritual practice. It says: you do not get to invent God according to your fears or your cravings. You submit to God's holiness. This is why idolatry is treated not as a mere theological error but as a moral catastrophe. To worship the wrong thing is to become the wrong kind of person. The unseen realm may be populated in later developments, but worship keeps the focus from dispersing: there is one God worthy of ultimate allegiance.

Together, prophecy, law, and worship build a monotheistic imagination that is not a mere philosophical monism. It is a moral and communal architecture. That architecture can incorporate a cosmic struggle motif, but it will interpret it through covenant faithfulness,

prophetic critique, and worshipful submission. This is one of the sharpest contrasts with any tradition that begins by framing reality primarily as a metaphysical battle. In the Abrahamic world, the first battlefield is not metaphysics; it is fidelity—faithfulness to the living God in the midst of temptation, injustice, and fear.

5.3 Continuity and discontinuity: Judaism to Christianity and Islam

To say that the Abrahamic lineage "actually runs" through covenantal Judaism is not to deny later developments. It is to locate them accurately: Christianity and Islam arise in conversation with Jewish scripture, Jewish practices, and Jewish monotheistic imagination, but each introduces decisive claims that both depend upon and transform that inheritance.

Christianity is simultaneously continuous and discontinuous. It is continuous in its scriptures, its moral seriousness, its claim that Israel's God is the one true God, and its inheritance of prophetic hope and eschatological expectation. It is discontinuous in its central claim: that the covenant God's decisive act is not only in exodus and law, but in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and that this act reconfigures the identity of the Messiah, the meaning of the law, and the scope of God's people. Christianity intensifies the Abrahamic backbone by claiming that God's covenantal faithfulness culminates in a universal invitation—often framed as a new covenant—without abolishing the moral seriousness of holiness. It also develops distinctive doctrines (notably about the identity of Christ and the nature of God's self-revelation) that Judaism does not accept.

Islam likewise stands in continuity and discontinuity with the Abrahamic story. It is continuous in its radical monotheism, its reverence for Abraham, and its insistence that God judges, commands, and restores. It is discontinuous in its claim to final and corrective revelation, with its own scripture and prophetic authority structure, and in its distinct account of how prior communities received and sometimes distorted divine guidance. Islam therefore locates itself not as a branch of Judaism or Christianity but as a restoration and completion of Abrahamic monotheism. Yet the structural backbone remains recognizably Abrahamic: God is one, history is morally accountable, revelation binds communities, and the end of history is judgment and restoration.

For our purposes, the key point is this: Christianity and Islam do not need Zoroastrianism to explain their basic structure. Their structure is already present in the covenantal-prophetic-worship backbone inherited from Judaism. Where motifs overlap with Zoroastrian themes, they do so within a framework that is already strongly formed and internally constrained. A motif may be shared; a vocabulary may rhyme; an image may echo. But the lineage of identity—who God is, how God is known, how moral reality is structured—runs through the Abrahamic story-

world: covenant, prophecy, law, worship, and the branching claims of Christianity and Islam as reinterpretations of that inherited revelation.

This backbone also clarifies why doctrinal differences about evil matter so much. In a covenant framework, evil is not merely an opposing cosmic principle; it is rebellion against God, betrayal of the covenant, injustice against the neighbor, and refusal of worship. That does not reduce evil; it makes it more concrete. It says: the deepest spiritual conflict is not only "good versus evil" in the abstract. It is fidelity versus idolatry, truth versus lie, justice versus oppression—played out in history under the gaze of the one God who acts, speaks, judges, and saves.

With this backbone established, we can now compare more precisely: how do the Abrahamic traditions' sovereign monotheism and covenantal history reshape the motifs that appear similar to Zoroastrian themes? And how can we speak of influence, if at all, without confusing shared motifs with shared foundations?

6. Dualism Versus Monotheism: The Core Difference in "God"

If the comparison between Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic traditions is going to reach anything deeper than surface motifs, it must face the central fault line: not whether both speak of good and evil, angels and demons, judgment and restoration, but what each tradition is doing when it says "God." The most important difference is not in the intensity of moral language but in the metaphysical grammar beneath it. Zoroastrianism can sound dualistic at the level of cosmic narrative; the Abrahamic traditions insist on a monotheism so strong that evil cannot be an ultimate peer. This does not automatically make one "more true" than the other; it does clarify what each model is trying to protect and why the similarities in motifs do not license sameness of doctrine.

A disciplined approach begins with distinctions. "Dualism" is often used as a blunt label, but it actually names several different things. Likewise "monotheism" can mean a bare numerical claim or a thick theological commitment. If we do not distinguish the types, we will argue past one another and mistake rhetorical drama for metaphysical assertion.

6.1 Metaphysical dualism, moral dualism, and rhetorical dualism

Metaphysical dualism is the strongest sense of dualism. It means that reality at its foundation is constituted by two opposed ultimate principles. In this frame, good and evil are not merely choices or historical forces; they are built into the being of the world as co-ultimate poles. Metaphysical dualism has a certain explanatory power: it makes the persistence of evil intelligible without forcing evil to be traced back—however indirectly—to the good God. If evil has its own ultimate source, then God is not implicated in its existence.

But metaphysical dualism also carries heavy costs. If there are two ultimate principles, then "ultimate" is divided. Worship and allegiance become conceptually unstable: which ultimate governs the final meaning of reality? If both are ultimate, then neither is sovereign. The moral universe becomes a balanced battlefield without a final guarantee. Even if one believes the good principle will win, the question arises: by what right or necessity? Victory becomes contingent rather than grounded in ultimate being.

Moral dualism is different. It does not claim two ultimate principles. It claims a real moral polarity in lived reality: good and evil are genuinely opposed, not merely relative preferences. Moral dualism can exist inside strict monotheism. It says: even if God is one, the moral landscape is not gray. Truth and falsehood, justice and oppression, fidelity and betrayal are not alternative lifestyles. They are incompatible directions. Moral dualism is thus an ethical claim: the world has moral structure, and our choices align us with one direction or the other.

Rhetorical dualism is different again. It is the use of polar language—light and darkness, truth and lie, God and the devil—to intensify moral urgency and clarify decision. Rhetorical dualism is common in prophetic and apocalyptic speech precisely because it can pierce moral complacency. It is not necessarily a metaphysical theory. It is often a moral weapon: a way of refusing to let injustice hide behind complexity. The risk is obvious: rhetorical dualism can be mistaken for metaphysical dualism, and then the rhetoric hardens into a worldview in which nuance becomes betrayal and opponents become embodiments of evil.

These distinctions matter because Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic traditions can overlap at the levels of moral and rhetorical dualism while diverging at the metaphysical level. People often see the overlap (both speak in polar terms) and assume the deepest level is the same. It is not. The argument here is not that Zoroastrianism is "merely rhetorical," but that we must be careful about which kind of dualism is actually being asserted in any given text or later system. Likewise, we must recognize that Abrahamic monotheism can use intense dualistic rhetoric without granting metaphysical parity to evil.

6.2 Evil as rival principle versus evil as creaturely rebellion

Here the difference sharpens. In a rival-principle model, evil is not merely the corruption of good; it has a kind of ontological weight. It is a structured opposition that is not fully reducible to creaturely choice. Evil becomes, in some sense, a "source" rather than merely an outcome. This model explains why evil feels active and organized. It can account for the way deception replicates itself, the way cruelty takes on a momentum beyond individuals, and the way societies can become possessed by lies. It treats evil as something with agency-like force.

But the rival-principle model raises the question of ultimacy. If evil is a principle, is it co-eternal? If it is co-eternal, then God is not the sole ultimate. If it is not co-eternal, then evil's origin must

still be explained. And if evil is an ultimate principle, then moral hope becomes structurally fragile: the cosmos is divided at its foundation.

In the Abrahamic traditions, the dominant model rejects evil as an ultimate rival. Evil is not a co-equal principle. Evil is rebellion, corruption, misuse of freedom, deception—something that arises within creation rather than alongside God as an independent ultimate. Satan and demons, where affirmed, are creatures, not gods. Even when evil is described in vivid cosmic terms, it is still constrained by the conviction that God is Creator and sovereign. This model protects monotheism at full strength: there is one ultimate source of being, one God worthy of worship, one final judge.

But this monotheistic model creates its own tension: if evil is not ultimate, how can it be so effective? How can a created rebellion become so vast? How can a good creation produce such disorder? The Abrahamic traditions answer this in different ways: by emphasizing freedom, the corruptibility of creatures, the social multiplication of sin, the deception of idolatry, the reality of spiritual adversaries, and the patience of God in permitting a history that will finally be judged. The key point is that evil is real and dangerous, but it is not metaphysically necessary. It is parasitic, derivative, and doomed—not because it is trivial, but because it is not the ground of being.

This is why the phrase "core difference in God" is accurate. The question is not merely "Is evil real?" Both frameworks treat it as real. The question is: "What is God's relation to evil?" In the rival-principle frame, God is set against an oppositional source. In the monotheistic rebellion frame, God is set against a creaturely revolt and its cascading consequences. Both can generate a cosmic moral struggle motif. But they generate it differently, and they protect different theological truths.

6.3 What each model protects: God's sovereignty, moral seriousness, human responsibility

Every theological model is trying to protect something. The world is morally complex, and speech about God must hold multiple demands at once. It helps to name what each model is trying to safeguard, and what it risks.

The rival-principle model protects moral seriousness by refusing to reduce evil to mere lack or mistake. Evil is active, organized, and antagonistic. This model can capture the lived experience of being opposed by deception, and it can make sense of the way evil seems to have "strategies." It also protects, in one form, a certain intuition about divine goodness: if evil has its own source, God is not implicated in evil's existence.

But it risks compromising God's sovereignty. If evil is metaphysically ultimate, then reality is not unified under one source. This can make worship conceptually unstable and hope metaphysically precarious. It can also risk fatalism: if two ultimate forces are locked in conflict,

then human agency can feel like a pawn in a cosmic chess game rather than a responsible participant called to repentance, mercy, and justice.

The strict monotheistic rebellion model protects God's sovereignty. There is one Creator, one final judge, one ultimate source of reality. This model also protects a unified moral order: goodness is not one force among others; it is aligned with the Creator's own being and purpose. Evil cannot finally win because it is not the ground of the world; it is a distortion of it.

But it risks, if handled carelessly, diminishing the felt reality of evil. People can hear "evil is derivative" as "evil is not that serious." That is a mistake. Derivative does not mean harmless. A parasite can kill. A fire can consume even if it is not "ultimate." So monotheistic traditions must constantly speak in a double register: evil is not ultimate, yet it is deadly; it is not a rival god, yet it can enslave; it is not metaphysically necessary, yet it is historically pervasive.

Both models, in their better forms, can protect human responsibility. The rival-principle model can emphasize that every moral choice participates in a cosmic alignment. The monotheistic rebellion model can emphasize covenant accountability and the reality of repentance. But both can also fail. Rival-principle language can tempt externalization ("the evil force did it"), while monotheistic language can tempt domestication ("it's just human weakness"). The disciplined posture refuses both failures. It insists that evil is real enough to resist and shameful enough to repent of, without granting it ultimacy and without denying human agency.

So what is the practical synthesis at this point? It is not a merger. It is a clarified distinction:

- The traditions can share the motif of cosmic struggle without sharing the metaphysical claim of two ultimate principles.
- The Abrahamic traditions can speak in polar, warfare-like rhetoric while still insisting that evil is creaturely and derivative.
- Zoroastrian moral cosmology can intensify ethical seriousness without automatically implying that evil is a co-equal deity.

And this brings us back to the epistemic humility voiced earlier: these are subtle points, and we should resist false certainty. But humility does not mean vagueness. It means precision about what we can say. The core difference in "God" is not a trivial metaphysical quibble. It is the hinge on which worship, hope, and moral accountability turn. If God is not sovereign, then evil has a metaphysical foothold that threatens ultimate hope. If evil is not taken seriously, then moral speech becomes cheap and justice becomes sentimental. The best theology, in any tradition, is trying to hold both: God's ultimacy and evil's reality—without making either into an idol of explanation.

7. Resurrection and Judgment: The Moral Grammar of End Times

Eschatology is often treated as a sideshow—an arena for speculative timelines, coded predictions, and ideological boundary-marking. But within the great religious traditions, resurrection and judgment function less like a calendar and more like a moral grammar. They are the rules by which ultimate meaning is spoken. They tell you what kind of universe you live in: whether justice is real or merely desired, whether evil is finally accounted for or merely endured, whether the body is disposable or destined, whether history ends in entropy or in truth.

This is why the motif of resurrection and judgment matters so much in the Zoroastrian–Abrahamic comparison. It is not merely a shared "end-times" imagery. It is a shared insistence that the moral structure of reality does not stop at death and does not dissolve into ambiguity. In all these traditions, the end is not simply what happens last. It is what is finally revealed: the unveiling of what was true all along, the settling of accounts, and the setting-right of what history bent crooked.

At the same time, the similarities are not identity. "Resurrection" can mean different things depending on the tradition's understanding of the human person and God's relation to creation. "Judgment" can be framed as retribution, restoration, or a complex unity of both. And "the end" can be imagined as annihilation of evil, transfiguration of creation, vindication of the righteous, or the public disclosure of truth. The moral grammar overlaps; the theological accents differ.

7.1 Bodily resurrection across traditions

The insistence on bodily resurrection is one of the most morally charged claims a tradition can make. It says that persons are not merely souls passing through matter, and that justice is not merely spiritual consolation. It also says that death does not have metaphysical authority to erase the meaning of life. This is not only a hope. It is an argument about the nature of reality.

In the Abrahamic context, bodily resurrection becomes a way of protecting several convictions at once.

First, the body matters. The body is not an embarrassment to be escaped but a meaningful arena of obedience, suffering, love, and injustice. Much human evil is done through bodies—through hunger, violence, sexual exploitation, imprisonment, torture, and killing. A purely "spiritual" afterlife can sound like moral evasion: a story that comforts without repairing. Resurrection insists that the same embodied person who suffered and acted will stand in the light of truth. It is a claim that the moral record of embodied life cannot be dismissed as a temporary costume.

Second, resurrection resists the tyranny of death as an eraser. If death ends all accounting, then history's winners are often the violent and the deceptive. Resurrection says that death is not the final court. This is not sentimental optimism; it is a refusal to let murder and oppression become metaphysically normal.

Third, resurrection protects the goodness of creation. In a strict monotheistic framework, the material world is created by God and declared good. Even when the world is fallen or disordered, it is still God's world. Resurrection therefore aligns with the idea that God does not abandon creation but redeems it. Redemption is not the abandonment of matter; it is the restoration of what matter was meant to be.

In Zoroastrian tradition, resurrection and world-renewal motifs function similarly as a moral vindication of truth over the lie and of order over destructive chaos. The end is not merely the exit of the righteous into a spiritual realm; it is the rectification of the world itself. This preserves the claim that moral reality is built into the structure of the cosmos. If the world is a moral drama, then the drama must have a morally meaningful resolution. Resurrection participates in that resolution: it says the struggle is not merely symbolic; it reaches the full reality of human persons and the world they inhabit.

Across traditions, then, bodily resurrection is not merely a supernatural add-on. It is a moral thesis: justice must be as concrete as the wrongs that were done. The body is where much of history's injustice happens; therefore the body cannot be excluded from history's final meaning.

Two cautions belong here.

First, "bodily" does not always mean "identical to present biology." Traditions can affirm continuity of personhood while imagining transformed embodiment. The moral point is continuity and accountability, not a crude reassembly of current physical processes. Second, resurrection language can be misused as escapism or cruelty when it becomes a substitute for justice now ("God will fix it later, so we don't have to act"). In its healthy form, resurrection intensifies present responsibility rather than diminishing it, because it implies that actions are eternally significant.

7.2 Judgment as justice: retribution, restoration, or both

Judgment is where the moral grammar becomes explicit. The promise of judgment says: the universe is not morally indifferent, and the hidden record will not remain hidden. But what kind of justice is judgment? Here traditions vary in emphasis, and the comparison becomes more subtle.

Retributive judgment emphasizes moral accountability as deserved consequence. Wrongdoing is not merely "unhealthy" or "misaligned"; it is culpable. It harms real victims. It violates truth. It

therefore merits condemnation. Retribution is the grammar of seriousness. It says that evil is not merely a wound to be healed; it is also guilt to be answered for. Without some retributive element, moral language can slide into therapeutic neutrality, where "sin" becomes "brokenness" and perpetrators become merely "unwell." That may protect compassion, but it can also dishonor victims and weaken moral clarity.

Restorative judgment emphasizes that God's justice aims at repair: the righting of relationships, the healing of what was distorted, the restoration of truth and order. Restoration is the grammar of hope. It says that justice is not merely punishment; it is the re-establishment of right reality. It also affirms that divine judgment is not arbitrary rage but purposeful rectification. Where restoration dominates, judgment is the means by which the world becomes what it was meant to be.

Most mature traditions, when read carefully, hold both elements in tension rather than choosing one exclusively. Retribution without restoration can become bleak: justice as mere payback, with no telos beyond penalty. Restoration without retribution can become sentimental: justice as mere therapy, with no moral accounting for cruelty and deception. The lived moral demand seems to require both: condemnation of evil as evil, and repair of the world as a meaningful end.

This is also where the motif intersects with the earlier discussion of evil's status. If evil is creaturely rebellion, judgment must address culpability. If evil is a cosmic adversarial force, judgment must address both participation and liberation. Either way, judgment is portrayed as the moment when lies collapse: excuses fail, masks drop, propaganda burns off, and reality is seen as it truly is.

In Abrahamic frameworks, judgment is also deeply relational. It is not merely a cosmic sorting algorithm; it is the verdict of the living God who knows, sees, and weighs. This makes judgment personal, not in the sentimental sense, but in the sense that moral reality is ultimately accountable to a personal divine will. In Islamic imagination, the Day of Judgment is a dominant organizing reality: the world is a test, deeds are weighed, truth is unveiled. In Christian imagination, judgment is often joined to themes of mercy and redemption, with differing emphases across traditions: some stress acquittal and union, others stress transformation and sanctification, others stress accountability and recompense. In Jewish imagination, judgment preserves the moral seriousness of covenant life and the claim that God's justice is not defeated by history's apparent injustices.

In Zoroastrian contexts, judgment and purification are often portrayed as the decisive resolution of the cosmic moral struggle, where truth is vindicated and the world is renewed. The moral principle remains: what is aligned with truth endures; what is aligned with deception is

overcome and removed. The shape differs, but the grammar overlaps: justice is real, and the end is morally meaningful.

7.3 The "end" as a revelation of divine character

Eschatology is not only about human destiny; it is about God's character. The end is the moment when the deepest questions about God can no longer be deferred.

Is God good? The end must show it.
Is God just? The end must enact it.
Is God sovereign? The end must secure it.
Is God merciful? The end must reveal it without making mercy into moral indifference.
Is the universe morally structured? The end must display the structure openly.

This is why the end-times horizon is so powerful psychologically and spiritually. In daily life, God's character is contested by experience. The righteous suffer; liars prosper; the wicked die peacefully; the innocent are crushed. If we stop there, we are tempted toward cynicism or despair. Eschatology says: the present is not the whole story. The end will reveal what the present conceals.

But this also introduces a subtle danger: using eschatology to avoid present moral responsibility. If the end will settle everything, why labor now? The best answer given within these traditions is that the end does not excuse the present; it judges it. The end is not a cancellation of history; it is history brought into full light. Therefore the end intensifies responsibility: it makes present choices weighty because they participate in what will be revealed.

In comparative terms, the shared motif of resurrection and judgment is best understood as a shared refusal of moral absurdity. It is the claim that reality is not finally governed by brute force, entropy, or propaganda. Reality is finally governed by truth. And truth, at the end, is not merely known; it is enacted. The world is shown to be what it really is: morally structured, accountable, and oriented toward restoration.

So resurrection and judgment are not merely doctrines on a shelf. They are moral grammar. They tell communities how to speak about evil without granting it victory, how to speak about suffering without dissolving into nihilism, and how to speak about God without turning divine goodness into an empty slogan. The "end" is therefore not primarily a schedule. It is a revelation—of what justice means, of what mercy costs, and of who God is.

8. Not the Parent, But Perhaps a Neighbor

If we have done the prior work correctly—naming shared motifs without collapsing doctrines, distinguishing types of dualism, and tracing the Abrahamic backbone through covenantal history—then the conclusion that suggests itself is neither sensational nor dismissive. Zoroastrianism is not the "parent religion" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But it may plausibly be a theological neighbor whose moral and eschatological imagination overlapped with, and in some cases subtly influenced, developments within the Abrahamic world—especially at the level of imagery, narrative shape, and the intensification of certain themes.

"Neighbor" is the right word because it fits how religious ideas typically travel in empires and borderlands. Neighbors share air. They hear one another's music. They borrow tools. They sometimes argue and sharpen their differences. But they do not thereby become one family. A neighbor can influence without generating; a neighbor can echo without authoring; a neighbor can supply a dramatic vocabulary that a tradition can adapt while still remaining itself.

8.1 Why Zoroastrianism is not the "parent religion"

The "parent religion" claim fails for reasons that are clearer now than they were at the beginning.

First, parenthood implies genealogical origin. The Abrahamic genealogies are primarily internal: Israel's covenantal narrative; prophetic critique; law and worship; and later developments that branch into Christianity and Islam. Those developments are not best explained by importing a cosmic metaphysic from outside. They are best explained as transformations within a tradition already constrained by monotheism, covenant accountability, and the belief that God acts in history.

Second, the decisive doctrines are not shared. Motifs can overlap, but the core commitments do not collapse. The Abrahamic traditions insist, each in their own way, on God's singular sovereignty, on evil as non-ultimate, and on the primacy of covenantal and revelatory history. Zoroastrianism, even in its most monotheistically read forms, tends to dramatize opposition in a way that can sound structurally dualistic at the cosmic level. These frameworks are not interchangeable. You cannot derive Abrahamic monotheism from a strong rival-principle dualism without altering the very identity of "God" and "evil" in the Abrahamic grammar.

Third, the "parent" narrative is usually driven by a methodological mistake: it treats later clarity as earlier origin. If one tradition's eschatology is more systematized in the sources we happen to have, it becomes tempting to treat that system as the source of another tradition's less explicit or more dispersed materials. But doctrinal maturity is not the same as chronological priority. A later, cleaner map does not necessarily generate an earlier, messier terrain.

Fourth, the “parent” claim often smuggles in a verdict about truth. Sometimes it functions as a debunking tool: if Judaism, Christianity, and Islam “got” their end-times from Zoroastrianism, then their claims about revelation are undermined. But historical influence does not adjudicate truth. Even if influence exists, it could be interpreted as providential convergence, as shared human grappling, or as a legitimate borrowing of morally clarifying imagery. Genealogy is not theology unless you force it to be.

So “not the parent” is not a defensive slogan. It is the best descriptor available once you attend to foundations rather than motifs. The Abrahamic traditions do not arise out of Zoroastrian metaphysics. They arise out of covenantal history and monotheistic worship.

8.2 Shared concerns without shared cosmology

At the same time, it would be equally irresponsible to deny the reality of shared concerns. The motifs are not random. They correspond to pressures that religions must answer if they are to speak credibly about moral reality.

One shared concern is the felt scale of evil. Human beings repeatedly experience evil as something bigger than individual intention: it propagates through systems, recruits ideologies, and outlives generations. Traditions that speak of a cosmic struggle are trying to name this scale. They are saying that evil is not merely the sum of bad decisions; it has an antagonistic structure. Zoroastrianism articulates this with unusual clarity; Abrahamic traditions articulate it within the constraints of monotheism and covenant.

Another shared concern is the need for moral accounting beyond death. If death erases the moral record, then the world is morally absurd. Traditions that affirm resurrection and judgment are refusing that absurdity. They insist that truth will be revealed, victims will be seen, and injustice will not remain normal. This concern is so universal that parallel development is always a live possibility. Yet shared concern also sets the stage for influence: in a contact zone, communities wrestling with the same moral problem can recognize and adopt useful narrative forms.

A third shared concern is the desire to preserve divine goodness without trivializing suffering. This is where both dualistic and monotheistic models struggle in their own ways. Dualistic frameworks can protect divine goodness by giving evil its own oppositional source, but they risk dividing ultimacy. Monotheistic frameworks protect divine sovereignty and unity, but they must explain how evil can be so pervasive without being ultimate. Both are trying to keep goodness and seriousness intact. The overlap of concerns does not imply shared cosmology; it implies shared moral stakes.

So we can state the comparison cleanly: Zoroastrianism and the Abrahamic traditions often address similar moral questions, but they answer them within different metaphysical and

historical architectures. The shared motifs are like similar tools used in different machines. The tools do not prove the machines are the same.

8.3 The case for subtle influence on eschatological shape

If we now ask, “Where might influence be most plausible?” the best answer is: not at the level of foundational monotheism, covenant, or revelation, but at the level of eschatological shape—how the end is imagined, dramatized, and populated.

Why eschatology? Because eschatology is where moral pressure becomes narrative necessity. When a community insists that injustice cannot be final, it must find language and images adequate to that insistence. Eschatological imagination naturally becomes more elaborate when communities face trauma, exile, oppression, or the apparent triumph of evil. In such contexts, contact with a neighboring tradition that already possesses a vivid end-times narrative can provide a repertoire of images that a community can adapt while still keeping its own doctrinal constraints intact.

This is the key: influence, if present, would likely be mediated and metabolized, not imported as metaphysics. A community might adopt a stronger sense of cosmic conflict, a more articulated hierarchy of spiritual agents, or a more vivid final resolution motif—not because it accepted a rival-principle ontology, but because the imagery helped it express and intensify convictions already latent within its own faith: God judges, God restores, truth will be vindicated, evil will be exposed.

There is also a conceptual reason why influence would cluster around eschatology. Eschatological motifs are often “portable” in a way that covenantal identity is not. You can adapt an image of final purification or cosmic restoration more easily than you can adapt a covenant narrative rooted in particular historical events. Portable motifs travel. Foundational identities resist travel.

A disciplined case for subtle influence therefore looks like this:

- The Abrahamic traditions already possess strong internal resources for judgment and restoration.
- In periods of contact and upheaval, those resources can be intensified and dramatized.
- Zoroastrian eschatological and moral-cosmic imagery could have provided a neighboring repertoire that helped shape the way some Jewish—and later Christian and Islamic—voices expressed end-times hope.

- Any such influence would not erase decisive differences: Abrahamic monotheism keeps evil non-ultimate and keeps the end anchored in the character and sovereignty of the one God.

Notice what this case does not do. It does not claim that Zoroastrianism "invented" resurrection or judgment for everyone else. It does not claim a one-way pipeline. It does not pretend to settle complex historical questions with a motif checklist. It simply says: in the ordinary way that neighbors influence neighbors—through proximity, shared anxieties, and the exchange of compelling narrative tools—Zoroastrianism could plausibly have shaped the eschatological imagination of communities within the Abrahamic world, especially where those communities were already searching for language robust enough to name evil's scale and justice's certainty.

This is why "neighbor" is the right conclusion. It respects both the undeniable resonance and the decisive difference. It allows us to speak honestly: Zoroastrianism is not the parent of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But it may have been a nearby voice—sometimes heard, sometimes resisted, sometimes translated into a new grammar—that contributed, at the margins, to the way the Abrahamic traditions learned to speak about the end of history, the defeat of evil, and the vindication of truth.

9. Epistemological Caution: Knowing God and Naming Evil

At several points in this paper a sober sentence has hovered at the edge of the discussion: these are subtle points for men who cannot really know. That sentence is not a retreat into fog. It is a discipline. Comparative theology—especially when it touches God and evil—must be practiced under epistemological constraint. The constraint is not that nothing can be known, but that what can be known is bounded by the limits of language, the finitude of human cognition, the fragmentary nature of historical evidence, and the spiritual danger of treating concepts as possessions.

The temptation to overclaim is amplified in exactly the topics we have been discussing. "Evil" feels so vivid and organized that we want to give it a perfect metaphysical explanation. "God" feels so ultimate that we want to define Him as if He were a theorem. "Influence" feels so tidy that we want it to function like proof. Yet the traditions themselves—at their most mature—often warn against this impulse. They permit clarity about moral direction and worship, but they resist total capture of the divine. This section argues that epistemic caution is not an academic nicety. It is theological hygiene. It keeps us from turning our explanations into idols.

9.1 The theological cost of overdefinition

Overdefinition is the moment when necessary distinctions harden into total systems, and total systems begin to displace reverence, repentance, and moral attention. It is not simply "being precise." Precision is good. Overdefinition is when precision is used to close the door on mystery, and the closed door becomes a substitute for the living God.

The first cost of overdefinition is idolatry of explanation. When we define God too tightly, we begin to worship the definition. The God of the living becomes an object of the intellect rather than the Lord of conscience and the judge of history. This is especially dangerous in discussions about evil. If we can explain evil in a way that feels complete—dualistic, monotheistic, privation-based, rebellion-based—we may secretly feel that we have domesticated it. But evil is not merely a concept. It is a force in human life, a pattern in history, a corruption that shows up in the self. Overdefinition can function as a defense against repentance: "I understand the system," rather than "I see my complicity."

The second cost is moral misdirection. Overdefined systems tend to generate shortcuts in real ethical life. If evil is overdefined as a cosmic enemy "out there," we externalize blame and become harsh. If evil is overdefined as merely human weakness "in here," we minimize systemic injustice and become naive. If judgment is overdefined as mere retribution, we can become vindictive. If restoration is overdefined as guaranteed outcome regardless of response, we can become morally lax. In each case, the overdefined model stops being a tool for discernment and becomes a machine that outputs predictable judgments without attention to persons, contexts, or the call to humility.

The third cost is false certainty disguised as faith. It is possible to confuse faith with cognitive closure. Faith, in the best theological sense, is fidelity: trust, obedience, and worship in the presence of incomplete sight. Overdefinition replaces fidelity with possession. The mind wants to own the object of worship. But what is owned is no longer God; it is a model. And models, however useful, cannot bear the weight of worship.

The fourth cost is polemical distortion. When a tradition is overdefined, it is easily weaponized. Comparative discussions can become moral theater: "Their God is dualistic," "Our God is sovereign," "Their view makes God guilty," "Ours makes evil trivial." These are often caricatures produced by overdefinition. They help communities feel righteous, but they do not help communities become righteous.

So epistemological caution is not an attempt to avoid doctrinal commitment. It is the recognition that doctrinal commitment is healthiest when it remains oriented toward worship and moral truth rather than toward total explanatory capture.

9.2 Why mystery is not failure

To modern ears, “mystery” can sound like an excuse. In the theological tradition, mystery is not a way to dodge difficult questions; it is a way to tell the truth about our cognitive position. God is not an object among objects. Evil is not a mere variable in an equation. And history is not a transparent dataset. The language of mystery says: there is real knowledge here, but it is knowledge of a reality that exceeds our conceptual reach.

Mystery is not the same as vagueness. Vagueness is unclear speech. Mystery is clear speech about the limits of speech. It can include strong claims—God is one, God is good, evil is real, justice will be done—while refusing to pretend that we can map the entire metaphysical mechanism by which these claims cohere.

Mystery is also not the same as irrationality. One can give reasons, draw distinctions, and reject contradictions while still acknowledging that the ultimate subject exceeds the frame. In fact, mystery often protects rationality by preventing category errors. The most common category error in theology is to treat God as a thing within the world, merely larger, older, or more powerful. Mystery says: stop. The Creator is not one more occupant of the cosmos. When you speak, you must speak differently—by analogy, by confession, by worship, and by moral obedience.

In the context of evil, mystery also prevents an immoral conclusion. Many theodicies fail not because they lack ingenuity, but because they become ethically offensive: they explain suffering in ways that diminish the sufferer or excuse the perpetrator. Mystery can function as moral restraint. It says: there are explanations we could propose, but we will not pretend to see the whole; we will not make God into the author of cruelty; we will not use metaphysics to silence lament. Mystery keeps lament honest. It allows the cry, “This is wrong,” to remain true even when one cannot explain why it was permitted.

Finally, mystery keeps the comparison itself honest. When we compare traditions, we should not act as if we stand outside them with a godlike view of their origins. The historical record is partial. The conceptual worlds are complex. Influence is hard to prove. Mystery here means intellectual humility: we may be able to show plausibility, patterns, and boundaries, but we cannot turn comparative motifs into a total, definitive genealogy.

So mystery is not failure. It is fidelity to reality’s depth. It keeps worship intact, moral seriousness intact, and scholarship honest.

9.3 The fruit criterion: truthfulness, repentance, courage

If epistemological humility could drift into mere quietism, it needs an anchor. The anchor is fruit: what a theological posture produces in a human being and a community. This is not a

modern pragmatism that replaces truth with usefulness. It is a spiritual realism: claims about God and evil are not only speculative; they form souls. Therefore one test of our language is whether it yields the kinds of lives that truth should yield.

Truthfulness is the first fruit. A healthy theology makes lying harder. It trains people to speak plainly about harm, to resist propaganda, to confess their own wrongdoing, to refuse self-deception. In the context of evil, truthfulness means not sentimentalizing, not euphemizing, not calling injustice "complexity" when it is cruelty. It also means not exaggerating into paranoia. Truthfulness is the middle path between denial and inflation.

Repentance is the second fruit. A healthy theology makes self-justification harder. It reminds us that evil is not only "out there" in systems and adversaries; it is also "in here" as pride, bitterness, cowardice, and complicity. Repentance is not self-hatred. It is reality-contact. It is the refusal to defend the self against the truth. Any theology that produces constant accusation of others without self-accusation is suspect. Any theology that produces constant self-accusation without hope is also suspect. The fruit criterion asks: does this way of speaking about God and evil lead to honest turning?

Courage is the third fruit. A healthy theology produces the capacity to act under moral pressure. Courage includes resistance to injustice, willingness to suffer for truth, and steadiness in fear. Eschatology, when healthy, does not create escapism; it creates endurance. Angel and demon language, when healthy, does not create obsession; it creates vigilance and sobriety. Moral struggle, when healthy, does not create hatred; it creates clarity and commitment to the good.

These fruits also serve as guardrails for comparative claims. When people turn the Zoroastrian–Abrahamic comparison into a parentage slogan, it often produces intellectual arrogance, cheap debunking, and a false confidence that undermines reverence. When people refuse all comparison, it can produce incuriosity and brittle defensiveness. The fruit criterion helps us keep the posture disciplined: we compare in order to clarify, not to conquer; we distinguish in order to worship rightly, not to score points; we admit mystery in order to remain truthful, not to evade accountability.

So the epistemological caution is not a plea to stop thinking. It is a call to think in a way that does not violate the subject. God is not a toy for the intellect. Evil is not a puzzle for entertainment. These are realities that claim us. The best posture is therefore one that combines clear distinctions with moral sobriety: enough clarity to avoid confusion, enough humility to avoid idolatry of explanation, and enough attention to fruit to keep theology tethered to the transformation it is meant to produce—truthfulness, repentance, and courage.

10. Conclusion: Similar Motifs, Distinct Theologies, Shared Questions

This paper began with a recurring temptation in popular religion talk: to treat Zoroastrianism as the "parent" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam because all four traditions, in various forms, speak of cosmic moral struggle, a populated unseen realm, and an end of history marked by judgment and restoration. We then took the long way around the temptation. We separated motifs from doctrines, distinguished types of dualism, traced the Abrahamic lineage through covenantal history, and applied epistemological caution to the urge for total explanatory capture. What emerges at the end is not a sensational genealogy but a disciplined conclusion: similar motifs can coexist with decisive differences about God and evil, and the most valuable outcome of the comparison is often not mastery, but better speech—speech that is morally serious, historically honest, and humbly bounded.

If we say it bluntly: the "parent religion" claim is a category error. Zoroastrianism may function as a neighbor, perhaps influencing certain ways the Abrahamic traditions imagined eschatological drama, but the foundational identity of the Abrahamic religions is not derived from Zoroastrian metaphysics. It is rooted in covenantal monotheism—God revealed in history, binding a people, forming worship, speaking through prophecy, and holding the world morally accountable. Where motifs overlap, they do so within different theological architectures. And where architectures differ, no amount of motif overlap can erase the difference.

10.1 What remains shared after all distinctions are made

After we have made every necessary distinction—dualism versus monotheism, rival principle versus creaturely rebellion, motif versus doctrinal ecosystem—something still remains shared. That remainder is important, because it explains why the comparison persists and why it is not merely academic.

First, there remains a shared moral realism. None of these traditions treats evil as mere misunderstanding or private pathology. Evil is opposed to truth, hostile to right order, and capable of organizing itself through deception and violence. The traditions differ in how they ground this claim metaphysically, but they converge on the existential point: evil is not a joke, and goodness is not a taste. Moral life is weight-bearing.

Second, there remains a shared insistence that human agency matters in a universe larger than the self. Whether framed as alignment with truth-order, covenant faithfulness, obedience to divine command, or resistance to deception, the moral agent is not an observer of cosmic forces but a participant. Choices are not merely local; they echo. This is why these traditions can speak of judgment without embarrassment: judgment is the disclosure that human life has meaning beyond social reputation and beyond death.

Third, there remains a shared refusal of moral absurdity. Resurrection and judgment, in their various articulations, represent a common protest against the idea that the world ends in injustice. The traditions insist that truth is not finally buried, victims are not finally erased, and cruelty does not become metaphysically normal. Even where details diverge, the moral grammar remains: history has an end that reveals, judges, and sets right.

Fourth, there remains a shared sense that theological speech is not mere description; it is formation. When these traditions speak of God and evil, they are not only explaining—they are training: training conscience, training hope, training courage, training truthfulness. This is why epistemological caution belongs in the conclusion. The topic is not neutral. Our models do not only represent reality; they shape us as moral beings.

So what remains shared is not "the same doctrine," but the same pressure of certain human questions: What is evil? Why is it effective? Is truth real? Will justice be done? What does it mean to live faithfully when history does not cooperate?

10.2 When similarity is a tool—and when it is a trap

Similarity can be a tool when it is used to clarify, not to collapse. Properly handled, it helps us notice where different traditions are responding to the same human pressures. It can also help us avoid provincial arrogance: the recognition that other traditions have grappled deeply with moral reality can sharpen our own seriousness. Similarity can illuminate the function of motifs: why spiritual ecologies develop, why eschatology becomes vivid under oppression, why moral struggle language intensifies in times of crisis. In this way, similarity becomes explanatory without becoming reductionist.

Similarity can also be a tool for humility. When one sees the recurrence of certain motifs across cultures, one may become less confident in tidy origin stories and more attentive to the shared human condition that generates these motifs. That humility is not relativism; it is sobriety. It keeps our comparisons anchored in reality rather than in slogans.

But similarity becomes a trap in at least three ways.

First, it becomes a trap when it is used as proof of parentage. Motif overlap is not genealogy. The "parent religion" claim is often a rhetorical shortcut that substitutes for careful analysis of how doctrines are constrained by larger frameworks. It confuses resemblance with origin and treats complex historical development like a linear pipeline.

Second, similarity becomes a trap when it produces the "same idea" fallacy. Two traditions may speak of judgment, angels, demons, and cosmic struggle, but the meaning of those terms is shaped by their doctrinal ecosystems. If one tradition insists on God's singular sovereignty and the creaturely status of evil, while another frames opposition in more structurally dualistic

terms, then similarity in imagery does not entail similarity in metaphysics. Treating analogies as identities is the fastest path to misunderstanding.

Third, similarity becomes a trap when it is weaponized—either to debunk or to romanticize. Some use similarity to say, "Your religion is derivative," and thereby claim superiority. Others use similarity to say, "All religions teach the same thing," and thereby erase the truth-claims that actually matter to believers. Both moves avoid the hard work of comparison. The first makes the comparison a tool of contempt; the second makes it a tool of flattening. Neither respects the integrity of the traditions or the seriousness of the questions.

A disciplined approach therefore uses similarity as an instrument, not as a verdict. Similarity can open inquiry; it cannot close it.

10.3 The final wisdom: clarity in what we say, humility in what we cannot

The final wisdom of this paper is simple in wording but demanding in practice: be clear where you can be clear, and humble where you cannot.

Clarity requires naming what can responsibly be said. We can say that Zoroastrianism is not the parent of the Abrahamic religions in genealogical or structural terms. We can say that the Abrahamic backbone runs through covenantal history, prophecy, law, and worship. We can say that the core difference in "God" is the difference between frameworks that can sound dualistic at the cosmic level and frameworks that insist on monotheistic sovereignty where evil is not ultimate. We can say that motifs overlap: cosmic moral struggle, spiritual ecologies of angelic and demonic agency, and an eschatological horizon of resurrection, judgment, and restoration. We can say that influence, if present, is more plausibly subtle and mediated—more likely to shape imagery and narrative intensity than to rewrite foundational doctrine.

Humility requires admitting what cannot be settled cleanly. We cannot, in many cases, prove direct borrowing with the confidence people crave. We cannot always date motifs with precision or disentangle early layers from later systematization. We cannot speak of God as if our models contain Him. We cannot name evil in a way that eliminates the need for vigilance and repentance. The desire for final explanation is itself a spiritual risk: it can become a way of avoiding the harder work of truthfulness, moral courage, and self-implication.

So the conclusion is not merely academic. It is a posture. It says: comparative theology is most faithful when it is neither naïvely confident nor lazily skeptical. It holds similarities without collapsing differences. It honors differences without turning them into contempt. It treats mystery not as failure but as honesty. And it measures its own claims by their fruit: do they produce truthfulness, repentance, and courage?

In the end, perhaps the most enduring reason this comparison “won’t die” is that it points beyond itself. It points to a human predicament that repeatedly generates cosmic language: we live in a world where evil is real, where justice is incomplete, where truth is contested, and where the heart demands an end that will reveal what the present conceals. The traditions answer differently. But the shared question remains, and it is the question that, for men who cannot fully know, still demands a faithful response: How will we speak of God and evil in a way that is true enough to resist lies, humble enough to avoid idolatry, and brave enough to live in the light we have?

11. References

11.1 Primary sacred texts across traditions

Zoroastrian and Iranian materials

- *The Avesta* (esp. **Yasna**; the **Gathas**; **Visperad**; **Yashts**; **Videvdad/Vendidad**). Standard critical editions and major modern translations.
- *Bundahishn* (Pahlavi cosmogony and eschatology; “Primal Creation” and renewal themes).
- *Denkard* (Pahlavi theological encyclopedic tradition; doctrinal summaries and mythic history).
- *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag* (visionary journey literature with afterlife/judgment imagery).
- *Zand* and Pahlavi commentarial traditions on Avestan texts (where available in translation).
- Royal inscriptions and Achaemenid-era materials (contextual, not “scripture,” but important for historical setting).

Hebrew Bible and Jewish Second Temple literature

- The Hebrew Bible/Tanakh (Torah, Prophets, Writings), with special attention to texts frequently discussed in eschatological development (for example: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel; also wisdom and psalmic materials relevant to judgment and divine kingship).
- *Daniel* (apocalyptic structure, resurrection language, judgment imagery).
- *1 Enoch* (especially the Book of Watchers and later Enochic components relevant to angelology).
- *Jubilees* (rewritten Bible; angelic mediation; cosmic moral framing).
- *4 Ezra (2 Esdras)* and *2 Baruch* (post-destruction apocalyptic reflection, judgment, restoration).
- Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran sectarian texts relevant to cosmic conflict language, angelic orders, and eschatological expectation).
- Rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmuds, Midrashim) for later systematizations and debates about resurrection/judgment.

Christian scriptures and major early sources

- The New Testament (Gospels; Pauline letters; general epistles; Revelation).
- Early patristic sources engaging resurrection, judgment, demons/angels, and the problem of evil (selected Fathers; also early creedal and conciliar materials where relevant).

Islamic primary texts

- The Qur'an (judgment, resurrection, angels, jinn, Satan/Iblis, divine sovereignty, moral accountability).
- Major hadith collections (for eschatological and angelological elaborations, used with genre and authenticity caution).
- Classical tafsir selections (representative early and medieval exegesis shaping afterlife, judgment, and unseen-world themes).
- Key kalam/philosophical texts where relevant to divine sovereignty, justice, and evil (representative Sunni and Shi'i theological treatments).

11.2 Historical-critical scholarship on Persian-Judaic interaction

Zoroastrian studies and Iranian religion (foundation and context)

- Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*.
- Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (multi-volume scholarship; development across periods).
- Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*.
- Shaul Shaked, collected studies on Iranian religion and its interaction zones (including Judaism in late antique contexts).
- Prods Oktor Skjaervo, studies and translations relating to Avestan and Middle Persian materials.
- Jamsheed K. Choksy, works on Zoroastrian ethics, ritual, and historical development.
- Ilya Gershevitch (and related philological scholarship), for linguistic and historical framing of Iranian sources.

- Encyclopedic reference: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entries on Zoroastrian doctrine, eschatology, and Avestan/Pahlavi corpora.

Judaism in the Persian period and Second Temple formation (historical-critical framing)

- Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (imperial context).
- Amélie Kuhrt, works on the Achaemenid empire and Near Eastern sources (contextual grounding).
- Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (broad historical synthesis; Persian-to-Roman transitions).
- John J. Collins, works on Second Temple Judaism and apocalyptic development (with attention to historical setting).
- Diana Vikander Edelman (ed.), volumes on Judah/Yehud in the Persian period (historical-critical essays).
- Rainer Albertz, works on Israelite religion and Second Temple developments (historical-critical reconstruction).
- *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (relevant volumes for Persian and Hellenistic periods).

Focused debates on "influence" (models, cautions, and competing theses)

- Studies arguing for significant Iranian influence on Jewish eschatology/angelology (representative scholarship across the 20th–21st centuries).
- Studies cautioning against overstated borrowing claims and emphasizing internal Jewish development and broader Near Eastern parallels (representative skeptical/nuancing scholarship).
- Works on methodological controls in comparative religion and intellectual history, especially regarding diffusion vs convergence vs shared problem-pressures.

(Practical note for your Reference section later: it helps to include at least one "strong influence" representative and one "skeptical/nuanced" representative, so the bibliography signals that you understand the debate is contested rather than settled by slogans.)

11.3 Comparative theology, angelology, apocalyptic studies, and theodicy

Comparative method and theological comparison

- Jonathan Z. Smith, essays on comparison and method (including the discipline of "comparison as a controlled operation").
- Francis X. Clooney, works on comparative theology as disciplined, tradition-respecting inquiry.
- James L. Fredericks, works on interreligious learning and theological method.
- Reference volumes: *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Theology* (methodological diversity and guardrails).

Angelology, demonology, and the unseen world

- Archie T. Wright, works on the origins and development of Satan/demonology in early Judaism.
- Loren T. Stuckenbruck, studies on Enochic traditions, Watchers, and Second Temple demonology.
- Annette Yoshiko Reed, studies on Enochic literature, angels, and early Jewish/Christian boundary formation.
- Philip S. Alexander, essays on Jewish mysticism and angelic traditions (where relevant).
- Reference volumes: *The Oxford Handbook of Angels and Demons* (broad survey across traditions).

Apocalypticism, resurrection, judgment, and restoration

- John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (classic framing of apocalyptic as a genre and worldview).
- Paul D. Hanson, foundational work on apocalyptic origins and social setting.
- Martha Himmelfarb, studies on tours of hell/heaven and apocalyptic imagination (judgment and visionary literature).
- George W. E. Nickelsburg, major work on *1 Enoch* and early Jewish eschatology.
- N. T. Wright, works on resurrection in early Christianity (historical-theological synthesis).
- Jon D. Levenson, studies on resurrection/restoration themes within Israel's covenantal imagination.

- Reference volumes: *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (cross-tradition coverage).

Theodicy, evil, and epistemic humility

- Alvin Plantinga, work on the logical problem of evil and free will defense.
- John Hick, work on "soul-making" approaches to suffering and moral development.
- Marilyn McCord Adams, work on horrendous evils and the moral limits of tidy explanations.
- Eleonore Stump, work integrating analytic rigor with narrative, suffering, and compassion.
- David Bentley Hart, critique of certain theodicies and emphasis on moral seriousness (use with awareness of confessional stance).
- Jewish theodicy and post-Holocaust theological reflections (representative works addressing protest, lament, and covenant under suffering).
- Islamic treatments of qadar (divine decree), justice, and moral accountability (representative kalam discussions across major schools).
- Reference volumes: *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*; *The Oxford Handbook of the Problem of Evil*.

The author has published over 4,800 AI-assisted papers at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Douglas-Youvan/research . Google Scholar has indexed these preprints, and if you want a particular reference, the AI mode of a Google search (Gemini) has efficiently catalogued these preprints.